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## ANCIENT COVERING FOR THE FLOOR.

THE BEGINNING OF THE USE OF CARPET AS A COVER OR ORNAMENT.

By W. A. ENGAARD.



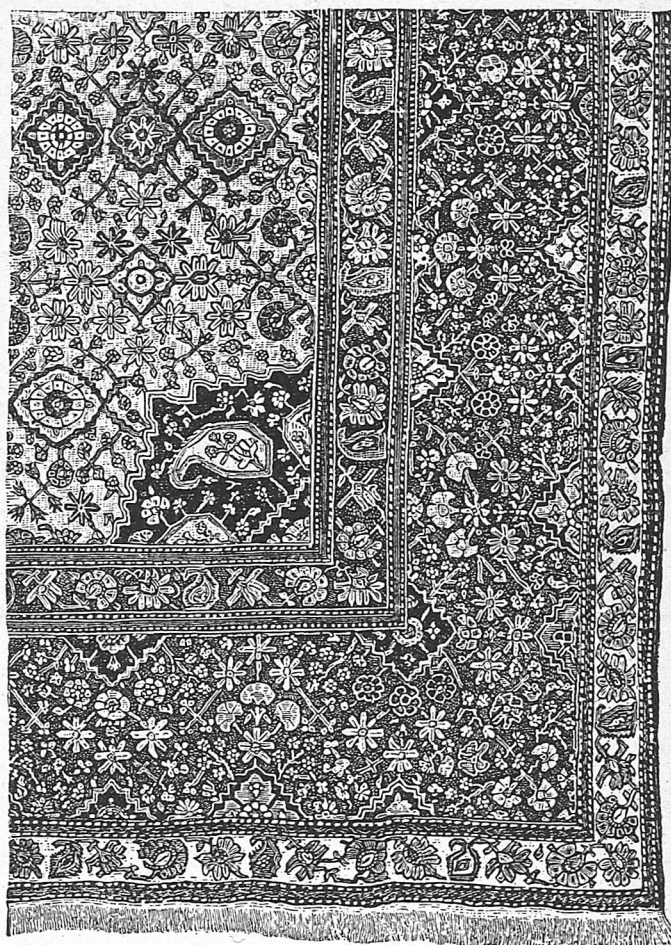
FIRST carpet was probably the skin of a wild beast laid down on the clay floor of a hut constructed of mud and nattles or loose stones carelessly piled together. Those fierce hunters and shepherds who founded Rome, and who, even when the Roman Republic was settled and powerful, used to come down from their mountains and terrify the soft Greek colonists

of the Campana out of their wits, were the very men to use the skin of a wolf or a deer for carpet. Lord Macaulay might have added such an accessory to his brilliant word-picture of an early Roman interior—when the largest lamp was lit, and the chestnuts glowed in the embers, and the kid turned on the spit, and the good man and his sons trimming their bows and arrows, or adjusting a plume to their helmet, listened with weeping and laughter to the story of how well the bridge was kept by Horatius in the great days of old.

Even when Rome was at the height of its grandeur and magnificence, that wild-beast carpet kept its place in their interior decoration. Such carpets were spread in the dainty halls of Pompeiiian houses for the Domina to rest her pretty feet, or for the naked slave-children to dance upon. But the skin grew to be that of a lion or tiger. It was lined with perfumed leather from Mauvilana, and the claws were of gold or silver. It was only in the decadence of Rome, when excess of luxury had brought about effeminacy and corruption, that from the lavish East came tales of glowing carpets, and rich silken stuffs for hangings. The Roman republican, honest, austere and chaste, wanted neither paneled door nor woven arras to his chamber; but the Roman emperor, with his infinite dissoluteness, came to need curtains of Tyrian hue and Syrian fabric to veil the portals of his harem.

Then came the barbarians and swept everything away. The early Christians killed classic art, but the Goths, the Huns and the Franks killed domestic elegance and comfort. Carpets wholly disappeared from the West, and, until the full sunshine of the Renaissance, were almost unknown in Europe. The Rois Faineants of France were content with fresh straw in their palaces. Even Queen Bess's keeping-room was strewn with rushes. Tapestry-weaving had, indeed, become a manufacture of great importance in the low countries, but upholsterers never dreamed of laying down tapestries which were to be walked upon. Floors were made in marble and costly mosaic and intricate marqueterie, but to this day Italy is the most carpetless country in Europe, and even in France, within the recollection of the present generation, a drawing-room carpeted in its entire length and breadth was a curiosity. There was, perhaps, a small square in the centre and another by the fireplace, but the rest was prettily-arranged oak planking, duly polished every morning with beeswax by the frotteur, who, for that purpose, attached a

pair of scrubbing-brushes to his feet. The stairs of the French houses, even of the best class, were equally destitute of carpet, and the treacherous slipperiness of both stairs and flooring was provocative of the most involuntary gymnastics on the part of the inexperienced visitor. You "shinned" your way up to the first floor as though you were ascending the Acala Santa, and it was in the position of a Siamese on all fours that you entered the presence of Madame la Comtesse. As for your bedroom, the floor was neither carpeted nor planked. It was simply paved with red tiles, very cool and pleasant in the summer, but far from agreeable to the feet in winter.



CORNER OF CASHMERE RUG.

While the West was sunk in barbarism, the East was beautifully carpeted, and these delightful adjuncts of comfort and luxury necessarily followed in the train of the Mohammedan conquerors, who, during the dark ages, overran a portion of Europe. In the "dark ages" all was light at Constantinople and Damascus. Cordova and Granada. We ordinarily, but perhaps rashly, assume that the renewed use of carpets was brought to the West by the knights and barons returning from the crusades. We are not of this opinion. The Crusaders brought very little back with them, either of a moral or a physical nature. Carpets, with a hundred other luxuries, came to us through the commerce of Venice with India

and the East. At the time when thousands of Italian princes and nobles were shining in mirth on the icy marble floors of their palaces, the salons of Venice were thickly and richly carpeted, and the use of thin-stuffs slowly penetrated through the countries supplied with commodities by the merchants of the most serene republic.

As regards tapestry, properly so-called—that is to say, the imitation of painting or needleworked stuff—it has a strong claim to be considered an invention, if not peculiar and original to Europe, at least one which, from the earliest times, has been acclimatized in the West. The most important establishment in the world for artistic tapestry is that of the Gobelins, and of the display made by this imperial manufactory at a Paris exposition a brief notice may not be out of place.

The Gobelins Tapestry Works can scarcely be mentioned without reference to the cognate imperial manufactory of porcelain at Sèvres. They are invariably classed together, and in the exhibition we find the superb salon which con-



AN INDIA RUG.

tains the products of Sèvres most appropriately draped with Gobelins tapestry. The manufactory itself is in the Rue Mouffetard, Paris, and here are made not only the famous "Gobelins," but the less celebrated carpets called "de la Savonnerie." The building was originally the Garde Menth of the crown. In 1662 all the weavers, dyers, embroiderers and designers, who worked in the Louvre, the Savonnerie and the Tuileries, were collected at the Gobelins, and the new organization was formally installed under the patronage of the Grand Monarque. Francis I. had previously established a manufactory of tapestry at Fontainebleau. Henry II.'s craftsmen worked at the Hospital of the Trinity, and Henry IV. established his tapissiers after the expulsion of the Jesuits at the convent in the Rue St. Antoine. When the R. R. P. P. came back the tapissiers were fain to move to the Palais des Tournelles, near the Place Royale. It is good, however, when we mark the definite settlement of these artisans by Louis XIV. in the building of the Rue Mouffetard, which had belonged to a wealthy family of dyers called Gobelin, to remember that the tapissier ordinaire of the great king was father of a certain Jean Baptiste Roquelin, otherwise known as Molière.

The first director of the Gobelins was the famous painter of ceilings, Charles Le Brun. Among his assistants were Bian de Fontenay and Baptiste Monnoyer, the flower painters,

and that Dutchman, Vandermeulen, who used to paint battle pictures on the soles of Louis XIV.'s shoes.

The illustrious portrait painter, Mignard, succeeded Le Brun, and among the directors have been Coypel and Budy, the animal painter. Boucher, too, of pink nymph and cupid notoriety, ruled the roost here in the days of Louis XIV., and did his best to ruin the manufactory by insisting that nothing but his own meretricious pictures should be copied. During the revolution little was done, but the manufactory was not entirely suppressed. Under the empire the cold hand of sham classicism was laid upon the Gobelins, as upon every other art work which Napoleon I. could touch, and the large-bodied, soulless compositions of David and Vien were copied by the acre. The manufactory languished under the Restoration and monarchy of July, but new life and spirit were infused into the Gobelins by Napoleon III.

#### DECORATIVE NOTES.

**T**HERE are many beautiful designs in carpets this season; colorings with soft tans, rose and blue predominating are the most stylish at present.

Hardwood floors with rugs are always correct taste, both from a sanitary and artistic standpoint. Of course old Persian and other Oriental rugs are best, but high-priced. There are many good American imitations, fair in color and quality and much lower in price, that will answer the purpose very well.

As Oriental rugs are very rich and dark in coloring, they show to better effect in rooms where the general decorative scheme is light.

Furniture should be well made and durable, no matter how simple in form, as such furniture lasts for years, regardless of the changing styles.

Fads in furniture, as well as other things, are not desirable investments, as they are only the fancy of the hour, and are soon relegated to a merited oblivion.

Neither is it considered good taste to tie ribbons, fans and tidies, and other needless ornaments (?) on any piece of furniture, however plain.

Harmony and simplicity are the keynotes to all artistic decorations. Variety is also to be sought, but it should have some fundamental principles on which to build; it must be unified with some one particular color, or one particular material or style.

Hangings add greatly to the beauty of a home, but they should be used as hangings, and not twisted, looped and pressed out of all semblance to their original intention; the simplest and easiest arrangement of droop and fold are the best in the long run.

Pictures, of course, are a necessity, but oil paintings, unless strictly first-class, are to be avoided. Dainty water colors, etchings and photographs in plain wood or white enameled frames, are always in good taste. Avoid white mats; delicate gray or soft buff will fall in with most any scheme of color.

No well-decorated room is complete without its bric-à-brac, but it must be good to be artistic at all; plaster statuettes, Dresden ornaments and such like are to be avoided.

A few bits of old and quaint antiquities, such as old and quaintly-shaped metal lamps, a piece of old bronze or a bit of antique pottery are both curious and effective.

Do not group these treasures all in one corner or shut them up in a cabinet, but scatter them here and there about the room, where they will show to the best advantage.

A draped divan, or cosey corner, luxurious with its multiplicity of soft pillows, is always a desirable addition to a room, but it must be adapted to its position and surroundings, and look almost as if it had grown there, otherwise it is simply a "store fitment," and had better be left out altogether.

